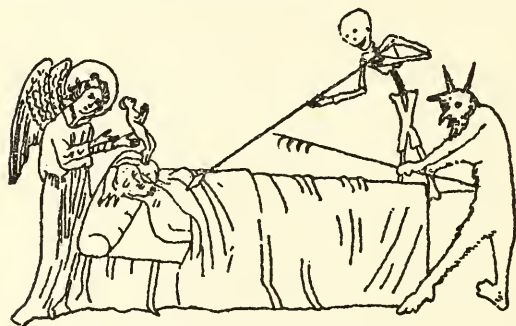


THE CHRISTIAN CONCEPTION OF DEATH.

BY THE EDITOR.

IN CHRISTIANITY the names Death and Devil are as closely coupled together as in Buddhism. Death is the wages of sin, and it was Satan who brought Death into the world from which the Saviour is expected to rescue mankind.

Christianity of the first and second century was a spiritualistic movement, but the conception of spirit among the early Christians was rather materialistic.



THE LAST MOMENT OF LIFE.
(Representing early Christian views. From ancient manuscripts.¹)



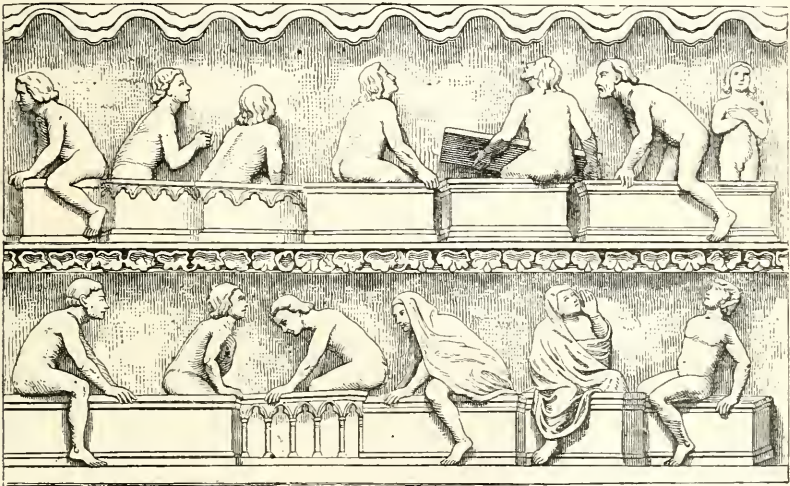
STRUGGLE FOR THE SOUL.

However, we must here, as in many other respects, distinguish between Christ and the Christians. According to the synoptic gospels Jesus did not enter into a discussion of any philosophical problem; his religion was practical, not theoretical. Yet the Jesus of St. John, in agreement with the doctrine of the Logos, identifies the life of the soul with language and defines spirit as the words which he speaks. He says: "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." (John vi. 63.) If the nature of

¹ See Bastian's *Verbleibs-Ort der Seele*, Plate 1. Reproduced from *Allerlei aus Volks- und Menschenkunde*, Vol. II., Plate XVII., 5 and 7.

spirit had been understood in this sense, the Church would not have passed in its evolution through a number of grievous errors; it would have avoided the materialism which characterises both its psychology and its dogma of the life to come.

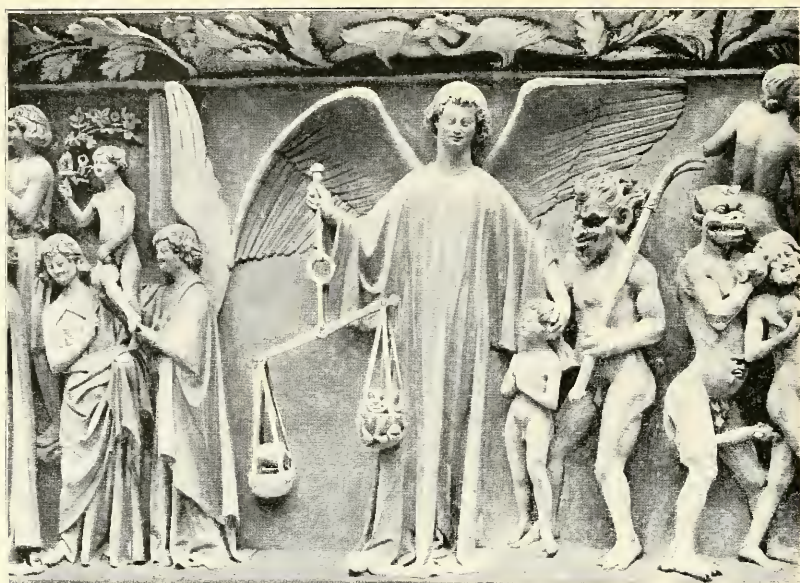
St. Paul taught that Christ had bodily risen from the dead, and he regards Christ's bodily resurrection as a guarantee of the bodily resurrection of all those who believe in Christ. He believed that the bodies of the dead would on their resurrection at the great day of the Lord be transfigured, and the Church formulated the doctrine in the Apostle's Creed in the terse but unmistakable formula of "the resurrection of the flesh."



THE EARLY CHRISTIANS' IDEA OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD. (13th century.)
From the Cathedral of Rheims, France.

Many frescoes and bas-reliefs in the Christian cathedrals prove how very intent the Church at all times has been on the doctrine of a resurrection of the flesh. The most popular hymn of the German Reformed Churches, both Lutheran and Calvinist, which has only of late been altered by a few liberal congregations, enumerates details and emphasises that on the day of resurrection "we shall be covered by this very same skin; these very same eyes shall behold God,¹ and in this very same flesh we shall see Jesus."

1 "Dann wird eben diese Haut
Mich umgeben wie ich gläube.
Gott wird werden angeschaut
Dann von mir in diesem Leibe.
Und in diesem Fleisch werd' ich
Jesus sehen ewiglich."



CHRISTIAN REPRESENTATION OF THE LAST JUDGMENT.

Sculptures on the main entrance of the Cathedral at Bourges, France. Fourteenth century. (Reproduced from *Klassischer Skulpturenschatz*.)



CHRISTIAN REPRESENTATION OF HELL.

Sculptures on the main entrance of the Cathedral at Bourges, France. Fourteenth century. (Reproduced from *Klassischer Skulpturenschatz*.)

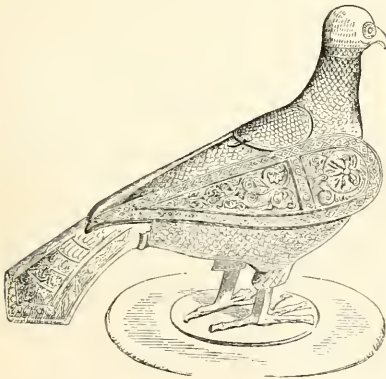
The belief in a bodily resurrection was, in spite of its materialism, the dearest hope of the early Christians; and their materialistic view of immortality is only of late giving way to a nobler, purer, and more spiritual conception.

Christian art naturally originated with the decoration of graves. The Catacombs, where the dead bodies of the early Christians and their martyrs lay became places of worship, and it was customary to celebrate the sacrament over the very tombs of the dead. The sanctity attached to dead bodies is especially apparent in the custom of burying some saint, if possible the patron saint of the church, underneath the altar itself, a practice which now begins to be neglected, but is sometimes still adhered to in the Roman churches even in the United States.



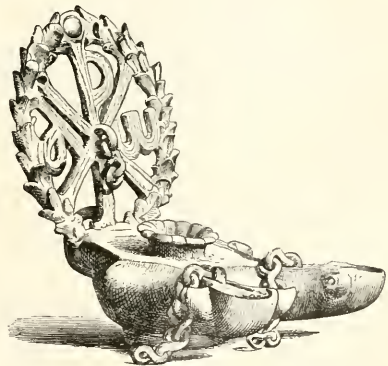
CHRIST AS ORPHEUS.

A painting in the Catacombs. (After F. X. Kraus.)



PERISTERA.

A dove of gilt silver for receiving the Eucharist. From the Catacombs. (After F. X. Kraus.)



LAMP FROM THE CATACOMBS.

Showing the anagram of Christ, (XP) and the Ω .

The custom of having a grave underneath the altar gave rise to the establishment of the crypt, which is never missing in any Roman Catholic cathedral of the Middle Ages.

The earliest products of Christian art, such as we find in the Catacombs, are mere imitations of classical *motifs*. Dr. Francis Xavier Kraus, when speaking of early Christian painting, says:

"The ornamental system is, upon the whole, the same as in the contemporaneous pagan paintings. We find wreaths, cornucopias, vines, birds and other animals. In addition we find the seasons represented as youthful virgins and also genii. Even the dolphins and tritons of profane art are not missing. All these things were as natural and conventional in Greco-Roman ornamentation as the letters of the alphabet and the words of the language. Thus, we can understand that Christian artists applied the implements of paganism without hesitation, and no one thought of their pagan religious significance."

The transition from pagan to Christian art is gradual. In the Catacombs, for instance, Christ is represented as Orpheus with the

lyre, or as the good shepherd carrying a sheep after the fashion of a calf-bearing Hermes. The virgin with the child finds its prototypes in various maternal deities, such as the Egyptian Isis, nursing Horus, and the Greek Mother Earth, Gaea Kurotrophos. An independent spirit of Christian art develops first in peculiarly Christian symbols, among which the favorite subjects are the lamb, the fish,¹ and the dove. In addition we find the chrisma, the monogram of Christ, a combination of *XP*, the two first letters of the word *Χριστός* and the *A* and *Ω*, symbolising God as the Beginning



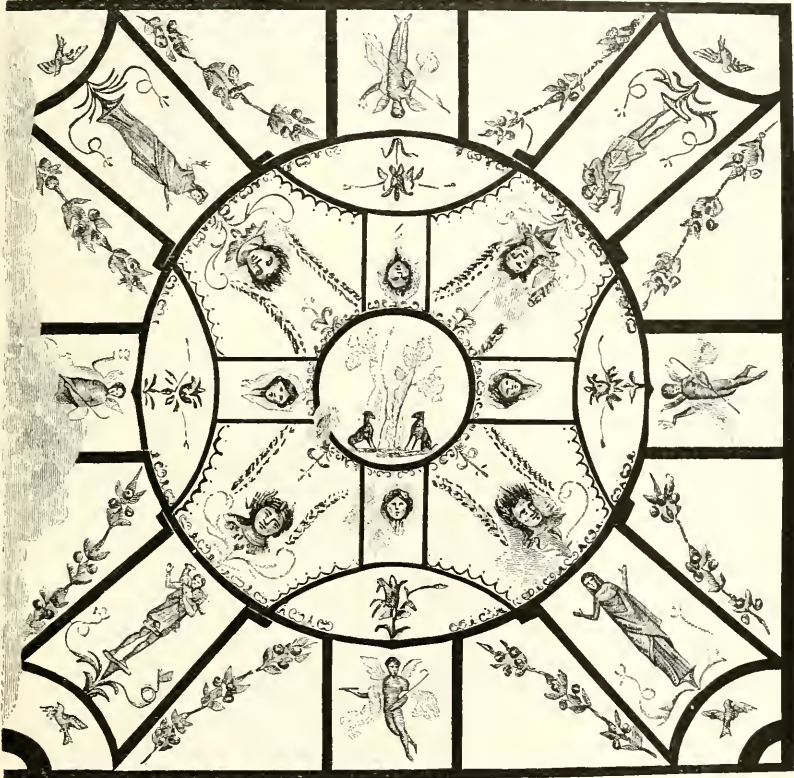
THE CALF-BEARING HERMES.

(From *Denkmäler des klassischen Alterthums*.)

and End of all things. When gradually the better classes of Roman society began to join the Church, the Christian sarcophagi almost rivalled in elegance and beauty of design their ancient classical prototypes. But the further north we come, the rarer are ornamented stone coffins. The sole instance in Germany is the sarcophagus of Treves, representing Noah in the ark. The artist's work is almost crude, but it shows a pious spirit and possesses the charm of naïveté.

¹ The word "fish" (ΙΧΘΥΣ) was anagrammatically interpreted to mean *Ἰησοῦς Χριστός Θεοῦ Υἱός Σωτῆς*, "Jesus Christ, God's Son, the Saviour."

The most famous piece of art of this kind is perhaps the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, who died in 359 at Rome. Here pagan subjects are replaced by illustrations of Biblical events, such as Daniel among the lions, Jesus preaching, the Saviour's entry into Jerusalem on an ass, etc. The technique is quite pure in style and as rich in execution as the best pagan work. It shows warmth of sentiment in the disciples and earnestness in the attitude of those



CEILING OF SANTA LUCINA. (After Rossi. Reproduced from F. X. Kraus.)

who teach. But (says Dr. F. X. Kraus, quoting from Schnasse¹) it lacks individuality and strength. The faces of all the apostles are made after the same pattern and the expression of the various persons is monotonous.

The tombstone of Eutropus is of special interest because we learn from the picture that he was a sarcophagus-maker by trade. He is represented at work assisted by his apprentice. The inscrip-

¹ *Geschichte der Ital. Kunst*, I., 58. See Kraus, I. c., p. 117.

tion,¹ which speaks of him as “saintly² and fearing God,” as well as the dove with the olive branch, indicates that he was a Christian. The man standing behind the artist is perhaps his son. According



THE TREVES SARCOPHAGUS REPRESENTING NOAH IN THE ARK. (After F. X. Kraus.)



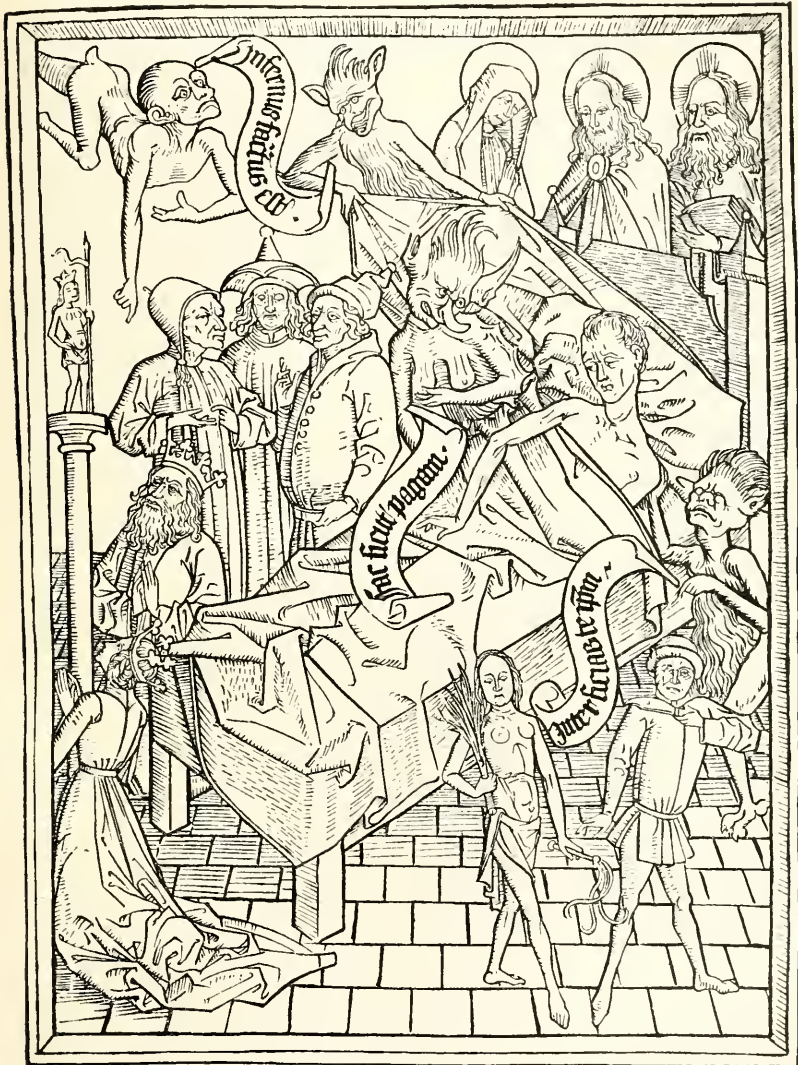
THE SARCOPHAGUS OF JUNIUS BASSUS, Rome. (After F. X. Kraus.)

to Fabretti the vial in his son's hand would indicate that Eutropus died a martyr's death.

¹ The inscription reads: ΑΓΙΟΣ, etc. See Kraus.

² The term ἅγιος, “saint or saintly,” is a synonym of Christian. It is a term by which the members of Christian congregations frequently called themselves.

During the Middle Ages people were anxious to have their bodies rest in holy ground where they would be protected until



THE DYING MAN'S TEMPTATION.

(From *Ars Moriendi*; first temptation. Devils try to induce him to seek assistance from false gods, after the manner of the pagans, or to escape suffering by committing suicide.)

doomsday against the evil influence of the Devil. Thus the dead were buried underneath the pavement of the churches or in their

immediate vicinity. And here, too, the materialism of the early Christianity is retained, for almost all the mediæval tombstones identify the deceased person with his remains that lie in the grave. The most common style of their inscriptions reads *Ci-git*, or *Here lies*, or *Hier ruht*, etc., and if it is ornamented with sculpture, the



TOMBSTONE OF SIEGFRIED VON EPPSTEIN.
(Henne am Rhyu.)

stone frequently represents the man as lying in the coffin. It is rather an exception that Siegfried of Eppstein, archbishop of Mayence, is represented as crowning two kings of Germany, Henry Raspe and William of Holland. Apparently these two actions were regarded as the most glorious events of his life. But even here the traditional style is adhered to, for the artist only indicated the coronation scenes, and adapted this idea to the conventional form of tombstones. The archbishop lies in the coffin and the two kings upon whose heads he places the crown, are lying at each side.

The Christian faith has done much to give comfort to mankind in the tribulations of life, but when its purer aspirations were dimmed by a literal interpretation of its doctrines, when the pagan-like symbol was accepted as truth itself, Christianity did its utmost to

bring all the terrors of hell to bear upon every man when on his death-bed. The hour of death was supposed to be the decisive moment which would determine man's fate for all eternity. Therefore the early Christians anointed the dying and prayed over them. The breviary of Cardinal Grimani, now at the St. Marcus Library in Venice, contains a picture by Hans Memling (an artist of May-

ence who lived about 1450-1495) which characterises this conception of the hour of death. The patient is surrounded by praying



DEATH, THE SLAYER. Woodcut of the sixteenth century. (By H. Burckmair.)

monks with candles and crucifix and sees in his imagination the powers of both good and evil hover above him, both anxious to



THE HOUR OF DEATH.

After Hans Memling's picture in the breviary of Cardinal Grimani, at the Library of Venice. (Henne am Rhyn.)

snatch away his soul as soon as it would depart from the body.¹ The sacrament is prepared on an improvised altar. In the background, to the right, the physician stands helpless, while to the left a notary is busy drawing up the last will and testament.

Where there is a great strain, there follows, as a rule, a relaxation. The facts that make up a tragedy will naturally offer sufficient material for a comedy; and thus the seriousness of hell is contrasted by the grim humor with which this gloomy subject is frequently treated. The picture of hell in the *Tragico Comedia* by



HELL ACCORDING TO DIONYSIUS KLEIN'S TRAGICO-COMEDIA.
(Reproduced from Bastian's *Die Denkschöpfung*.)

Dionysius Klein (published in 1622) is an instance that illustrates this truth. And when we consider that in the days of Klein heretics were still burned, we must admire the courage of the author who dared to show the comical side of the traditional conception of eternal perdition. The moral significance is greater still when, judging from the text of the book, we have reason to assume that the author was not a scoffer but actually believed in the reality of the tortures of hell.

¹ There are even to-day some zealous ministers who have not as yet outgrown the mediæval barbarism of saving the souls of the dying. In a German soldiers' hospital during the Franco-Prussian war, a prominent Protestant clergyman who used to come to pray with the patients had at last to be refused admittance because there was a regular increase of the death rate immediately following his pastoral visits.